



## Coaching, Evaluating and Delivering Constructive Feedback – Learning Series

### Topic Nine: Diffusing Difficult Situations Job Aid

During a coaching conversation, our best intentions sometimes do not turn out as we planned. Our calm demeanor turns hostile, and our open-ended questions become closed-minded statements. When a conversation turns difficult, what do we do? Effectively leveraging opportunities in difficult situations requires a particular state of mind that will help you address problematic situations, behaviors and attitudes. With practice, getting in the right state of mind will take a matter of seconds.

#### What general frame of mind should I use to approach a difficult situation?

1. **Assume that you're not always right.** Your staff members have experience to offer, and there may be aspects of a situation you're unaware of. When you acknowledge that you have something to learn, questions such as "What have you done" become "What have I done," leading to more productive and less contentious interactions.
2. **Assume that your rationale is not the only one.** We typically find it easy to say that someone else is being unreasonable but hard to imagine that we are the ones being unreasonable. By entering a conversation with this possibility in mind, you'll find yourself asking more questions about the employee's reasoning and trying to uncover what it is that you've missed.
3. **Assume that the employee has good intentions.** Just because the employee has taken an aggressive stance or has said something negative about a team member does not mean that they intended to hurt anyone. Attribute positive reasons to the employee's actions and then ask questions about them.
4. **Acknowledge that different people have different needs and are motivated by different fears.** Some people are deadline-driven. Others are perfectionists, preferring to get the job done right at the expense of a deadline. Social people fear being isolated, not getting enough attention, or receiving disapproval. Whatever drives a particular person, remember that it may be different than what drives you and then frame your questions and your position with those differences in mind.
5. **Acknowledge that different people have different work styles.** Typically, people fall into one of four patterns:
  - **Directors:** Those who do things their way and work independently or competitively. These people tend to respond to short term objectives in solving problems and look for ways of accomplishing them.

- **Thinkers:** Those who do things carefully and cautiously after private consideration. Thinkers tend to respond well when they know they can get things right and are given time to plan meticulously for solving a problem or completing a task.
- **Socializers:** Those who seek approval from others and use persuasive communication to encourage collaboration. They are likely to show their feelings more easily and tend to respond when the feelings of themselves and others are taken into consideration.
- **Relaters:** Those who diplomatically find step-by-step solutions to encourage team stability. They are more likely to respond when asked to consider others' points of view and they often seek to restore harmony.

Identify the work style of your staff, rather than your own, and work from that basis to meet your coaching objectives.